

## Stars and Stripes Forever

---

John Sousa was born in Washington, D. C. on November 6, 1854. He was the son of an immigrant Portuguese father and a German mother. He went to Washington public schools, and at the same time, he studied music at a private conservatory. At the age of six, he learned to play the violin and later other instruments. In 1867 at age 13 he began to follow his father's career as a trombone player and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Band. He was discharged from the Marines 7 years later.

By 1880 Sousa was the conductor, composer, and leader of the U.S. Marine Band. He made this band into the best band in the world and held his position for 12 years. In 1892 he quit the Marine Corps to start his own band. Within months his band became just as good as the finest orchestras of the day and he became known as "The March King". Sousa was a man of strong self-discipline and extraordinary talent. "To all who knew him, he was a man of incredibly high moral standards." (site #2) Nothing seemed impossible to him. The Sousa band traveled the world in 1910-1911 and made over 270 pieces of work. He was a humble and

deeply religious man. “Composed only upon genuine inspiration and repeatedly stated that his melodies came from a “Higher Power”.” (Site #2)

On May 14th, 1897 John Philip Sousa performed his new song “Stars and Stripes Forever”. They start playing and people around stop in their tracks and listen to these incredible notes. Soon after they start playing everybody gets emotional. The song makes you so proud of your country to the point where people are starting to cry, the audience is starting to cheer and the audience is waving their hands around.

After the performance, I was able to interview Sousa. I asked him how he came up with such an inspirational and patriotic song. He told me a story of when he was supper sad because one of his managers had just passed away and wanted to get home as soon as possible. “God—and I say this in all reverence! I was in Europe and I got a cablegram that my manager was dead. I was in Italy and I wished to get home as soon as possible. I rushed to Genoa, then to Paris and to England, and sailed for America. On board the steamer as I walked miles up and down the deck, back and forth, a mental band was playing ‘Stars and Stripes Forever.’ Day after day as I walked it persisted in crashing into my very soul. I wrote it on Christmas Day, 1896.” (Site reference #4) When he was on board the ship he kept thinking back when he was the leader of the Marine Band. When he

played at public functions and could see the Stars and Strips of the flag flying in the white house. He started to remember all the places he had been to, all of the people he had met and the difference between the American people and other countries. He said “That flag of ours became glorified... And to my imagination, it seemed to be the biggest, grandest flag in the world.” (Site reference #4) That is how he got the inspiration to compose “Stars and Stripes Forever.”

When I listen to this song it makes the hair on my arm stand up and I get a little tingle in my stomach. This song makes me feel happy and sad at the same time because I'm happy for my freedom and sad for the people who have given their lives for America's freedom. I also feel very patriotic when listening to the song and I'm proud to be an American.

1<sup>st</sup> Site

<https://castle.eiu.edu/wow/classes/fa03/jpschild.html>

2<sup>nd</sup> Site

<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200152755/>

3<sup>rd</sup> Site

<https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Music/Ethnomusicology/Resonances> -

[Engaging Music in its Cultural Context \(Morgan-Ellis Ed.\)/05%3A Functional Music/12%3A Music for Moving/12.03%3A John Philip Sousa](#) -

[The Stars and Stripes Forever#:~:text=We%20will%20consider%20Sousa's%20most,and%20met%20with%20immediate%20success.](#)

4<sup>th</sup> Site

<https://www.marineband.marines.mil/Audio-Resources/The-Complete-Marches-of-John-Philip-Sousa/The-Stars-and-Stripes-Forever-March/#:~:text=Someone%20asked%2C%20%E2%80%9CWho%20influenced%20you,home%20as%20soon%20as%20possible.>

---